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SHRINE CEREMONIES IN KOREA

A Brief Statement

by A.E. Armstrong, Canada

"The veneration of her illustrious dead in places specially dedicated to their memory has been a national custom of Japan for ages past, and the State ceremonies for this purpose are treated by the Government as distinct from those of a purely religious nature."

- Government of Chosen

"Jinja (shrines) and religion are distinctly separated by our national Law and the reason for requiring the school students and pupils to go and make obeisance at the Jinja is based upon education, and the obeisance demanded of the students, pupils and school children is nothing else than to display their spirit of patriotism and allegiance."

- Mr. Watanabe, Educational Director for the Gov't of Korea

The educational policy of the Government of Korea is based on the Imperial Rescript on Education in which religion is separated from education. Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Government.

Mission Schools may register and secure the Government's privileges but sacrificing compulsory religious teaching, or they may decide not to register and retain compulsory religious education.

In recent years the Government has been realizing that education alone does not make 'good citizens' from the national point of view and has been advocating a 'religious revival' which is synonymous with the 'invigoration of the national spirit.' Shinto Shrines are the centre of this national cult and are separated by law from other religious shrines, a distinction not always made by many. On stated occasions pupils are required to participate in certain ceremonies at the Shinto Shrines, which rites are stated by Government to be purely patriotic and nationalistic and as not having any religious significance. It is, therefore, explained by Government that Christians can consistently take part in these exercises without any compromise of faith or principle, and it is declared that there is involved no violation of the principle of freedom of belief set forth in the Constitution.

Some missionaries hold that Christians cannot accept this interpretation at face value because sometimes religious acts are incorporated into the ceremonies. Other missionaries have accepted the Government's statements that there is nothing religious intended in the shrine ceremonies and have permitted their pupils to participate.

The Southern Presbyterians have decided to withdraw from secular education because "it is the feeling of the Mission that it is no longer possible to carry on their work in this realm without compromise of Christian principles."

The Northern Presbyterian missionaries have divided on the question. Some are continuing their schools; others have decided to close. The Board is awaiting the return of their Secretary in May when action is likely to be taken at the General Assembly.



The two Methodist Missions are continuing their schools and are complying with the Government's requirements. They are experiencing no interference as to Bible study, prayer, etc.

Our Mission has made no recommendation to the Board. The majority are in favour of accepting the situation, believing that time will settle the issue.

Mrs. A. F. Robb of Hamheung relates the following experience: "We had visits from the Inspectors in both our schools since you were here. In the Primary School 3 men (two Japanese and one Korean) came just as we were going to have prayers one morning, and said they would like to see our foreign service. So one came into the chapel and the other two sent each into a classroom for the class prayers. You remember that each day one-half the school has prayers in the chapel together and the other three classes separately in their class rooms. After that, they asked if we had a Bible lesson the first hour and they went in and listened to that, then talked a little and went off saying that everything was very good, etc. I was afraid that some objection might be raised but there was none at all. They went into the High School and attended prayers there, and the Secretary of Education, who was one of the three, addressed the students after the service was over and told them that the Government policy was to encourage three religions- Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity, and that Christianity was a very good religion. He hoped they would all appreciate their privilege of being in such a good school and would study Christianity well. He went on to tell them that the Shrine ceremonies were not religious and for them not to misunderstand them, for they were only expressions of patriotism and loyalty for the Empire. It was very encouraging to have this all so plainly stated, and it is quite a privilege to be able to carry on so much Christian teaching and seed-sowing as is done in the schools. Surely a harvest cannot fail. If the school should close, what will take its place,?"

Mrs. Robb states her own opinion thus: "The Government has insisted that going to the shrine is not a religious but merely a patriotic act, and my own view is that it is better to accept this view and make it only that."

Rev. William Scott of Hamheung writes: "The Shrine question is practically settled. The Government is not likely to retreat from their position nor go beyond it... Our schools have gone out. I myself went to the shrine for the first time, last month, accompanying Mrs. Robb. It was a very simple service and there was nothing that one could object to. The mode of expressing their respect to the departed may differ from ours, though much simpler than the Roman Catholic ceremonies. There is no idol on the altar, no incense is burned, a simple prayer is said, the hands clapped twice, all bow reverently, and the ceremony ends. This may have been a particularly brief observation of the rite, but that was all there was to it. I have witnessed more elaborate ones under different auspices, and not at the shrine.... My own final opinion is that we do the cause of Christ more harm by refusing participation - in spite of the Government's assurance that it is a national and not a religious rite - and being compelled to close Christian schools and thus hand over the entire educational process to the government. How long this emphasis upon extreme nationalism will continue no one knows. I prefer to maintain my place, do my bit for the Kingdom - which by the way is



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not so limited as it is in most non-Christian countries- and hope for the time when the Japanese, themselves, will see the folly of super-nationalism, and seek a truer internationalism. My own impression is that the change will come sooner than we usually expect. The results are not convincing; the cash returns, even, are disappointing; the tension is too great to be kept up for long; and he that wields the sword finds a ring of steel encircling him. Soon he is going to prove that it doesn't pay, and grow weary of it. Our task is all the more imperative- to teach the law of love, the benefit of mutual goodwill, the interdependence of all people, and their final dependence upon God. "And how shall they learn without a preacher" and the Christian teacher .?

Dr. William Axling, Secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan, has reported the interpretation of the Shrine Problem in Japan by the National Christian Council at its annual meeting in November, 1936, in a statement which is appended.

The English Presbyterian Mission in Formosa reports: "Our schools have in the matter of the shrine question followed what I understand to be the practice in Japan proper, that is, we are allowing attendance on formal occasions on the understanding that the ceremony is not religious. A meeting is held in the school previously to explain the nature of the occasion. We realize, however, that the whole question is very difficult, and that a slight change of emphasis in the Government attitude or requirements might necessitate a complete reconsideration."



## THE SHINTO SHRINE PROBLEM

Increasingly the matter of paying homage at the State Shinto Shrines is becoming a test of patriotism for every Japanese citizen. Pupils in the public schools and students in all educational institutions are regularly taken to local shrines. In many localities patriotic organizations, local officials and public sentiment bring pressure upon the members of the community to demonstrate their loyalty to the community and the nation by doing obeisance at these shrines. Where there is any hesitation coercive measures are sometimes resorted to.

It has become imperative, therefore, for the Christian Church to think the situation through, define its attitude and determine its action. This question was dealt with in a Round Table Conference held the evening before the Annual Meeting met and again in one of the sessions of the Annual Meeting. In this discussion the following matters were brought out:

1. The Government has insisted for many years and still adheres to the interpretation that State Shinto Shrines are not religious. They commemorate the memory of the nation's builders and those who have made outstanding contributions to the nation's life.
2. These shrines are national structures and are maintained by national funds.
3. The priests who serve at these shrines are not looked upon nor treated as religious leaders, but as government officials.
4. The purpose of these shrines according to the government's repeated declaration is to foster the spirit of reverence for the nation's builders, cultivate patriotism and serve as a system of social control.
5. The government considers obeisance at these shrines purely an expression of patriotism and respect for heroic personalities of the past.

For the Christian the following difficulties are involved:

1. The ritual employed at these shrines include features which are distinctly religious.
2. The priests who serve at these shrines offer prayers for the worshippers and the nation, conduct funerals and marriages and traffic in religious charms.
3. Many educational institutions take their pupils or students to these shrines for the express purpose of fostering their religious sentiment.
4. The masses look upon these shrines as religious and visit them for the purpose of worship.
5. Originally they were undoubtedly religious in character.
6. Many of these shrines were not built to the memory of the nation's builders but have a questionable traditional value.

The discussion seemed to lead to the following consensus of opinion:

1. Christians should recognize the national character and value of these shrines and as loyal citizens pay homage to those whose memories are enshrined there.
2. Christians should accept the government's interpretation that these shrines are not religious and help to make that interpretation known and understood in their own circles and among the people at large.
3. Christians should press for the elimination of the religious features connected with those shrines and their ceremonies.
4. Christians should help all concerned to an understanding of the difference between the obeisance paid at these shrines to the nation's notables and the worship of God.

